

Adeimantus and the Philosophical Meaning of Interruption

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The western philosophical tradition has spent over two thousand years talking about Plato's *Republic*, and it remains today the second most commonly assigned text in college.¹ This is to say that the *Republic* is perhaps the most talked about book in philosophy. As a result, there is a culturally inherited understanding of what the *Republic* says and is about. It is difficult to look at the text with unbiased eyes, although it is necessary to do so. I will do this by focusing on one individual, the interlocutor Adeimantus.

The philosophical discourse of the *Republic* is not the product of Socrates alone; his speech is influenced and critiqued by his conversation partners. Up until about fifty years ago, the interlocutors and the literary aspects of Plato's dialogues were mostly disregarded as accessories, but scholars now know that they shape the meaning of the dialogue. Recently the interlocutors have received greater attention in Plato's dialogues, but the interlocutors in the *Republic* specifically have not received comprehensive individual study.² I argue that these interlocutors are meaningful, individual contributors to the philosophy of the dialogues, and that they require further examination. Each interlocutor engages with and contributes to the philosophical discourse in a distinct way. In the case of Adeimantus, his presence in the dialogue compliments Glaucon's and demonstrates a different method of interacting with philosophy.

My exploration of Adeimantus in the *Republic* operates on two levels. How is Adeimantus important to the philosophy of the *Republic*, and, inversely, how is the

philosophy of the *Republic* important to Adeimantus? These questions capture something that is at stake in Plato. By writing dialogues rather than treatises or essays, Plato depicts philosophy as it actively interacts with and influences individuals. If individuals are to know what philosophy means to them, then it is essential to investigate what philosophy means to the interlocutors, who are individuals much like us.

To begin to answer these questions, I identified the sections in which Adeimantus is the active interlocutor and read them in isolation. Almost immediately, a very particular pattern emerged: Adeimantus only speaks in interruptions. Plato also intentionally specifies or dramatizes his speech as interruption. For example, Socrates says “I had something in mind to say in response to [what Glaucon had said], but his brother Adeimantus said” and later says “and I was going to describe unjust regimes in order, but...” (*Republic* 362d, 449a-b). These moments are key because the text does not just say that Adeimantus interposes; Plato narrates the moment and has Socrates comment that he was about to say something else. In other words, Plato is calling our attention to the fact that Adeimantus’ interruptions cause the dialogue to digress. If Adeimantus did not interrupt, a different philosophical discourse would have taken place. In this way, Adeimantus’ importance cannot be overlooked. Additionally, while other characters interrupt, it is only Adeimantus’ interruptions that are most often dramatized, which means that Adeimantus’ interruptions are specifically characterized as digressive in contrast to those of the other interlocutors. For example, Thrasymachus’ interruption in Book I is dramatized as being “like a wild beast,” but he

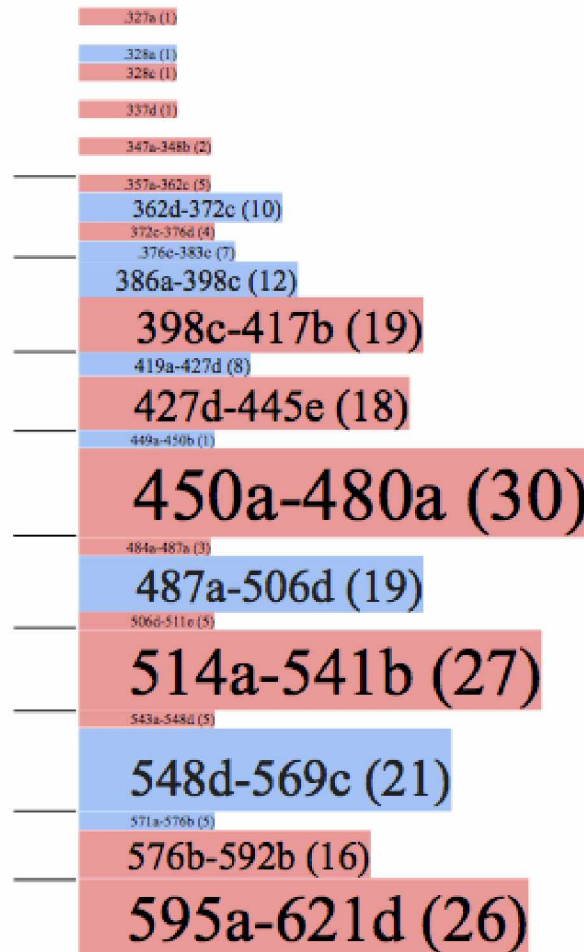
interrupted “when [Polemarchus and Socrates] paused,” rather than when Socrates was about to say something else (336b).

While Plato intentionally places emphasis on Adeimantus as interrupting, this particularity of the *Republic* has been overlooked by today’s scholars. There is no scholarly study that focuses on Adeimantus’ role of interrupting and redirecting the dialogue. His interruption at the beginning of Book V, where he insists Socrates speak about women and children in more detail, has received a great deal of attention, but it has not been connected to a larger pattern of the character. More frustrating, interruption is a known rhetorical device in ancient Greek literature, yet the definitive book addressing the meaning of interruption, Daniel Smith’s *The Rhetoric of Interruption: Speech Making, Turn Taking, and Rule Breaking*, makes no mention of the Platonic dialogues at all. Smith remarks that “interrupted speech is comparatively rare in Ancient Greek literature,” so its dense presence in the *Republic* is noteworthy (Smith 1). Additionally, in the Ancient Greek literature Smith does analyze, he consistently notes that interruptions are signals of important moments in the literature, and so his analysis of literature such as Homer and Herodotus provides precedence for an analysis of interruption in Plato as well.³

As a result, the question of interruption cannot be overlooked for understanding Adeimantus. The question of interruption is the question of what Adeimantus is saying and what Plato is representing through him. Scholarly attention is almost always given to what Socrates says, but that is incomplete. By emphasizing the importance of the interlocutors, I propose a new way of looking at and reading the dialogue. With that in mind, the figure below is a visual representation of how looking to the interlocutors

changes the way the whole of the *Republic* looks. Below is a diagram created to show which interlocutor speaks when, and for how long.

Blue is Adeimantus, and red is Glaucon and the number Stephanus Pages for which



they speak are noted. The lines to the side indicate the transition from one book to another.

We can see that Glaucon is the interlocutor approximately twice as often as Adeimantus, which could imply that Glaucon is Socrates' main concern. Combined with the dramatic emphasis Plato puts on Adeimantus as an interruption and diverter of that conversation, the suggestion is that Glaucon and Socrates' conversation is primary, and

that Adeimantus is more of an observer who interrupts when he deems it necessary. When Adeimantus does speak, it is considerable, and he does not let Socrates and Glaucon speak uninterrupted for too long. Glaucon and Socrates speak for the longest without interruption in the final section. For some reason, Adeimantus leaves the dialogue quite early. At a certain point, whatever it was that motivated him to interrupt ceases.

The rhetoric of Adeimantus' interruptions is revealing as well. It is interesting and instructive to compare the rhetoric of Adeimantus' interruptions and examples that are characteristic of Glaucon.

Glaucon	Adeimantus
"I want to hear you in turn condemn injustice and praise justice" (358d)	"You surely don't imagine" (362d)
"You lead, and I'll follow" (432c)	"You don't mean that at all" (362e)
"Lead on" (474c)	"How would you defend yourself against the charge..." (419a)
"It'll be good enough" (506d)	"You seem to be taking the lazy way out and to be cheating us." (449c)
"That's a necessity" (576b)	"All those who get themselves involved in philosophy become for the most part quite warped." (487d)

Glaucon trusts Socrates' word as truth, and he desires to be convinced. He even explicitly asks for a persuasive speech at the beginning of Book II. Adeimantus, in contrast, is critical of Socrates. He is not convinced, nor does he express a desire to be convinced as Glaucon does. The question that motivates the dialogue, whether a just life is the happiest life, is Glaucon's question, not Adeimantus'. Adeimantus' questions

are about the value and validity of Socrates' arguments. What becomes evident is that Glaucon and Adeimantus are interacting with the philosophical discourse in fundamentally different ways. For Glaucon, the discourse is an object of experience, and, for Adeimantus, it is an object of examination or even confrontation. Glaucon is the student of philosophy who is actively undergoing the process. Adeimantus is outside the experience and observing. This places Adeimantus in the position of critic or judge.⁴

If Adeimantus is considered as a critic, then the underlying shape of the conversation can be considered differently. On the left is the traditional understanding of the interaction of the three characters.



In the former, Socrates is the largest figure and Glaucon and Adeimantus have the same relationship to him. Some scholars give more or less emphasis to Glaucon or Adeimantus, but they are often considered mostly similar. On the right is my new proposal. Adeimantus is explicitly described as interrupting, his interruptions are critical, and he is secondary to Glaucon, so Adeimantus is placed on the outside of the conversation between Glaucon and Socrates. This positioning also depicts the brothers engaging with philosophy in two different ways. In a sense, these are the two ways that readers engage with philosophy or with the *Republic*. A reader may choose to suspend disbelief in order to experience the text uninterrupted, or a reader may choose to remain skeptical of the text and interrogate it.

These are typically engagements with philosophy that occur separately, but in the *Republic* the two interlocutors allow both of the engagements to occur at the same time. Readers are able to see philosophy judged as it is actively happening before us. Moreover, the questions that Adeimantus asks are the precise questions that Glaucon, someone being persuaded, cannot ask. Adeimantus asks what the best education of the youth is (376d). He asks whether philosophy is valuable or just useless and vicious (487d). He critiques the gods' place in education (378b). He asks whether Socrates is making the people he speaks of happy (419a). Glaucon is currently being educated, experiencing philosophy, and, hopefully, being led toward a happy life. To ask Adeimantus' questions, he would have to step outside of the education he is inside of. The questions Adeimantus asks are important in another way. They are in many ways reflective of the accusations made at Socrates' trial, "corrupting the young and not believing in the gods" (*Apolo*gy 24b). In that sense, they are the questions about the philosophical education most in need of answers. Adeimantus, of course, does not know these are the questions that will be asked in Socrates' trial. From his current perspective, they are important because they are about the fate of his brother.

Of all his interruptions, Adeimantus' last is the most revealing. After this exchange, Socrates and Adeimantus finish their conversation early, and so this is the exchange that resolves whatever was at the root of Adeimantus' interruptions. Glaucon and Socrates had been discussing the decay of regimes in cities and in souls. Socrates has just asked Glaucon what he thinks the timocratic man, a man ruled by the love of honor, would be like when Adeimantus interrupts. Adeimantus says, "I imagine," said Adeimantus, "for his love of victory at least, he'd come pretty close to this fellow right

here, Glaucon" (*Republic* 548d). Socrates responds by defending Glaucon. "Maybe in that respect," Socrates says, "but it seems to me he'd have a nature unlike his in these ways" (548e). Adeimantus' final interruption reveals two things. Firstly, in his final conversation with Socrates, the topic is Glaucon's soul. The questions Adeimantus asked earlier were heavily concerned with education and philosophy, which can be interpreted as questions about how those things will affect Glaucon. In his final interruption, Adeimantus brings up the topic of his brother directly, and his fear that his brother may be ruled by a love of honor. Socrates says that, in comparison to Glaucon, the timocratic man is less educated, less musical, more "obedient to rulers," and would "judge himself worthy, not for his speaking but for warlike deeds." (548e-549a). These remarks seem consistent with a soul less philosophic. Socrates seems to be implicitly defending the value of the education he has given Glaucon throughout the dialogue by demonstrating how philosophy may keep Glaucon from being timocratic. With the question of Glaucon satisfied, Adeimantus is satisfied. In some sense, the main question of Adeimantus all along was Glaucon.

There is one last development worth mentioning that may contribute to Adeimantus' silence at the end of the dialogue. Shortly after Adeimantus and Socrates' final discussion, there is a change in Glaucon and Socrates' conversation. Socrates chooses this moment to reinstate the question and answer style of discussion. Earlier Glaucon had requested that Socrates give a persuasive speech, and Socrates has agreed. Now, however, Socrates disallows Glaucon from merely following Socrates' discourse, and Socrates tells Glaucon that he must "look" and "examine" for himself the lives they are discussing. Socrates also criticizes lazy thinking. "It isn't enough,"

Socrates tells Glaucon, to "just to assume these things... one needs to investigate carefully... for the investigation concerns the most important thing, namely, the good life and the bad one" (578c). This is all to show that Glaucon is now being forced to assume a more critical stance and to be an examiner. With this shift, Adeimantus does not need to fulfill that role or worry that his uncritical brother may be lead astray. The opening image of the *Republic* is of Socrates walking with Glaucon up to Athens. For Adeimantus, then, the evening begins with seeing his brother being led along with Socrates. Perhaps now he may think Glaucon more able to walk upward by himself.

When considered, it is evident that all of the philosophical discourse in the *Republic* is the result of an interruption. As Socrates and Glaucon walk up to Athens, Adeimantus and Polemarchus interrupt them. Everything that follows, the entirety of the *Republic*, is the result of that first interruption. What becomes evident is that interruption occupies a central place in Platonic and Socratic philosophy. Plato intentionally writes dialogues and Socrates engaged in them, and interruption is an inevitable part of dialogue. In the *Republic*, these interruptions can and do dictate the course of the conversation. Interruption affirms that philosophy, dialogue, and the Socratic method are, to some degree, dependent upon and particular to the individuals taking part. The conversation is unpredictable because it depends upon the interlocutors who may interrupt and detour, and it is particular because the content is shaped by the ideas, concerns, and abilities of the participants. If Adeimantus was not there, the *Republic* would not be the same, and the same can be said of all interlocutors. If individuals think of the *Republic* as acting on them, perhaps the whole of it is an interruption since the *Republic* interrupts the reader. The *Republic* begins fairly abruptly, and the conversation

begins quickly and escalates. Readers are dropped unexpectedly into the text and have to figure it out. It, like any work of literature, takes the reader out of his or her life, and forces the reader to reconsider it in light of what was read.

David Roochnik notes that in the dialogue the *Sophist*, Socrates converses briefly with an unnamed man who does not want to participate in a dialogue (145). He would rather lecture, and “if he must converse, he wants a passive interlocutor” who will not interrupt him (145). This is not philosophy. Socrates in the dialogues is portrayed as radically different from a sophist or rhetorician; he contends with many diverse individuals, and he welcomes interaction from his listeners. Additionally, the absence of interruption is related to Plato’s critique of literature. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates laments that the written word is insufficient “because if you want to learn more, it continues to signify just that very same thing forever” and “it doesn’t know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not” (*Phaedrus* 275d-e). Books cannot be interrupted or respond to particular readers, but Plato provides a depiction of interruption and particular interlocutors in the dialogues that points to their necessary place in philosophy.

As embodied by Adeimantus, to interrupt is to examine and to put ideas on trial. In some sense, interruption is what it means to do philosophy: to always ask questions and to always keep the dialogue changing and developing. To study the interlocutors is to ask the question of the interaction between philosophy and the individual. Through Adeimantus, Plato demonstrates that philosophy is interruption. Individuals interrupt dialogue and change the course of philosophy, and philosophy interrupts us and changes our course as well.

Notes

1. This information is according to the Open Syllabus Project, an organization that compiles college syllabi. To date they have compiled over a million syllabi. With their compiled information, they have provided a ranking of the most commonly assigned texts. The *Republic* is second only to *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and Williams.

2. A brief sampling of recent works focusing on interlocutors includes but is not limited to: Beversluis, John. *Cross-examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000., Blondell, Ruby. *The Play of Character in Plato's Dialogues*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002., Nails, Debra. *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002., Craig, Leon Harold. *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*. Toronto: U of Toronto, 1996.

3. For example, he notes that "Herodotus reserved the use of intentional interruption for major turning points in the plot," and three of the four interruptions in Herodotus are by an individual also named Adeimatus (Smith 48).

4. In scholarship, the difference between Adeimantus and Glaucon is often dismissed as Adeimantus being the less philosophical brother. However, considering him an examiner would suggest he may be more philosophical than Glaucon. The strongest example of this dismissal in Craig chapter 5. See also Bloom 344-46.

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